# New York Theatre Critics' Reviews 1957

Volume XVIII, Number 7 • Rachel W. Coffin, *Editor* • Week of March 18, 1957

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"The Sin of Pat Muldoon"

**Asterisks indicate shows scheduled to play week of March 18, 1957*

*Theatre Critics' Reviews brings you each week the complete reviews as they originally appeared in these New York newspapers.*

NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
NEW YORK POST
NEW YORK MIRROR
NEW YORK WORLD TELEGRAM & THE SUN
NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
NEW YORK TIMES

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# "The Sin of Pat Muldoon"

Journal-American

March 14, 1957

## Faltering Idea Fails Despite a Fine Cast

By JOHN McCLAIN

"THE SIN of Pat Muldoon," which opened at the Cort Theatre last night, is also a sin against James Barton, in the name role, Elaine Stritch, who plays his daughter, and all the clients who appeared for the opening. It seems almost incomprehensible that this faltering idea, falling somewhere between pathos and humor and landing nowhere, should have been given a Broadway showing.

It is regrettable, too, because there are a couple of scenes wherein Barton exhibits the artistry for which he is noted; and there is another memorable moment in which Miss Stritch faces him with the sordid truths and exits to applause. The trouble is that nobody really cares what it's all about, and these are merely interludes in a suspended vacuum.

The author has chosen to invade the life of a dying Irish-American in Santa Clara, California. This would, of course, be Mr. Barton. He is brought home after a heart attack and it develops that he has not only committed the sin of waltzing down the garden path with a lush-lipped Mexican doll, but has also blown the single bit of security the family retained—ownership of an alley adjoining their house.

### Funny Moments

There is a sub-plot concerning his youngest daughter and the Mexican young man she loves, and there is Miss Stritch, who has been slaving to keep the family together and has her own reasons for being less than elated when she discovers what the old gent has been up to. There is also the family priest, the drudge of a wife, and the inevitable brother-in-law.

As stated, the emphasis falls somewhere in the no-man's land between farce and fact. Barton is funny in the moments when he rails against his confinement in the downstairs dining room, his impatience with facets of his life as an invalid.

On the other hand, there are scenes which approach importance when Miss Stritch gets down to the slim basics of the plot. But these are lost in endless and sometimes puerile considerations of what is going to happen to this dreary old man. It is obvious that he is going to die, and most of the people in the audience seemed to hope he would get on with it. The story just ain't there.

Besides Barton and Miss Stritch there are some other good operators in the cast who cannot be blamed for "The Sin": Katherine Squire, who plays the wife; Edgar Stehli, who plays the brother-in-law; James Olson, the priest; Gerald Serracini, John Heldabrand, and others.

Mordecai Gorelik has evolved the interior of a house which might as well be in Santa Clara, California, as anywhere else, and Jack Garfein moved the people through it with reasonable success, although I thought he kept a lot of non-speaking players in view when they didn't need to be.

This is probably not too important, however, since I'm afraid nobody will be speaking these lines much longer.

"THE SIN OF PAT MULDOON"

Play in three acts and five scenes by John McLiam; staged by Jack Garfein; settings by Mordecai Gorelik; lighting by Paul Morrison; costumes by Anna Hill Johnstone; presented by Richard Adler and Roger L. Stevens at the Cort Theatre, March 13, 1957. The cast:

Theresa Muldoon..... Patricia Bosworth
Brigid Muldoon..Katherine Squire
Cornelius De Lacey..Edgar Stehli
Gertrude Muldoon..Elaine Stritch
Pat Muldoon.....James Barton
Attendants....James McGillicuddy and Ross Bennett
Dr. Glass.....John Heldabrand
Father Gallagher...James Olson
Joe Vierra....Gerald Serracini

DAILY NEWS

March 14, 1957

## 'Sin of Pat Muldoon' Very Mortal

By JOHN CHAPMAN

Some talented actors and an equally talented audience had rough going last evening at the Cort Theatre, where "The Sin of Pat Muldoon" was presented. This play, by John McLiam, is an excessively sentimental and appallingly disjointed fabrication which is more suited to the amateurs than it is to the pros who have essayed it for the Broadway trade.

It presents James Barton, one of the most beloved actors and a very good one, as a salty old Irishman who has been brought home to die after a heart seizure. It offers the excellent Elaine Stritch in the role of one of his daughters, and Miss Stritch makes the most of one big and tearful scene. It challenges Katherine Squire with the dreary and complaining role of Barton's wife.

The setting, by Mordecai Gorelik, picturesquely represents part of a house in the cannery country of California. And what was Pat Muldoon's sin? Well, he sold the alley back of his house for $3,000, went on a toot with a tart and had a heart attack which spoiled his fun. It spoiled mine, too, last evening, for it took Pat three acts to die after he came home.

One of the producers of "The Sin of Pat Muldoon" is Roger L. Stevens, who also backed Adlai Stevenson.

New York World-Telegram
and
The Sun

March 14, 1957

# A Transgressor's Decline and Fall

By TOM DONNELLY.

All of the characters in John McLiam's "The Sin of Pat Muldoon" (at the Cort) engaged my sympathy, and I respect the author's intention, and to a considerable degree, his achievement. But I must reluctantly admit that, in the last analysis, the play struck me as depressing and rather monotonous.

Pat Muldoon is one of the more disreputable inhabitants of Santa Clara, Calif., and, when we first meet him, he has just been brought home from the hospital. He has suffered a heart attack and, to his wife's understandable horror and indignation, he has suffered it in "a wicked woman's hotel room." Mrs. Muldoon is an ardent Catholic, and it is a further source of grief to her that Pat has not made his Easter duty in something like 30 years.

It was the death of his only son that turned Pat away from the church. He is a cantankerous, noisy, and capricious fellow, and he remains unrepentant to the last. His only real regret is that he has squandered the family nest egg on that "wicked woman."

**Alternating Currents.**

There is virtually nothing in "The Sin of Pat Muldoon" that does not seem a fair representation of real life. Piety, bigotry, malice, and compassion sweep across the stage in alternating currents.

To fall back on a classic complaint, playwright McLiam's characters, for all their absolute credibility, are a bit too small for the peculiar requirements of the theater. The trick might have been turned if they had been hooked up to a compelling narrative. But, the play is not much more than a chronicle of a man's last illness. The prevailing effect is not merely clinical. It is more than that. It is painful, and to an agonizing degree.

There is a truly extraordinary sequence at the climax of the second act. The older daughter, having discovered that her father has sold the family's one bit of valuable real estate, and blown away the proceeds, bitterly accuses him. The old man has another heart attack; he is given drugs, and he lapses into a kind of delirium, recalling the death of his son in touching detail.

**Brilliantly Compelling.**

In the course of the evening James Barton does some superb acting as Pat Muldoon, but in this scene he conjures up images of pain and terror and torment that are so brilliantly compelling as to leave the spectator drained. It is a relief when the curtain descends. And, yet, the experience is not grand enough for tragedy, because it has not been placed in a tragic perspective. It is harrowing, in the way that a visit to a hospital may be harrowing.

For all his obstreperousness, and his bursts of irreverent humor, Mr. McLiam's central creation does not emerge as a joyously defiant sinner. He is, instead, a pathetic victim, and the villain of the piece is Bad Luck.

Whatever else may be said about it, "The Sin of Pat Muldoon" represents first-rate work in performance and production. Apart from Mr. Barton's really staggering contribution, fine portrayals are turned in by Elaine Stritch, as the elder daughter, by Katherine Squire, as Mrs. Muldoon, by Edgar Stehli, as a wistfully ineffectual brother-in-law, and by James Olson as a gentle, young priest who cannot begin to cope with the refractory hero.

And Gerald Sarracini, Patricia Bosworth and John Heldabrand are excellent in lesser roles.

Mordecai Gorelik's setting, of a Santa Clara kitchen and dining room, has a shabby vitality that is exactly right, and Jack Garfein's direction is excellent.

# New York Post

March 14, 1957

By Richard Watts Jr.

## The Misfortunes of Pat Muldoon

In "The Sin of Pat Muldoon," which opened last night at the Cort Theater, John McLiam has written an earnest, conscientious and heartfelt play on a serious theme. He has put into it his appreciative understanding of the torment of a troubled Irish-American family and what seems to be a deeply sympathetic personal passion. But, unfortunately, he has also made his drama almost unbearably tedious, heavy-handed and cumbersome, and, despite the commendable excellence of his intentions, the result is an evening of complete and utter ineffectuality.

His theme is the religious recalcitrance of the head of the Muldoon clan, who has lost his Catholic faith and refused to practice it since the death, years before, of his cherished son. Old Pat Muldoon likewise has it on his conscience that he had once gone off with a prostitute and, in the course of his adventure, had secretly sold his valuable property to pay for it. Chiefly, though, it is the loss of faith that bothers the other Muldoons and, despite the efforts of a nice young priest, Pat holds to his rebellion even when he knows he is dying of heart trouble.

Although Pat's two surviving children are girls, the family stresses and strains, and the wild mutual recriminations, have a stubborn way of bringing up memories of that other Irish-American family, the haunted Tyrones of "Long Day's Journey Into Night." But any such rebellious recollections are certainly of no help to Mr. McLiam, and I cite them only for the purposes of description. For, while "The Sin of Pat Muldoon" is filled with the horrors of clan bitterness, they are set down with a complete lack of the dramatic power that might have made them moving.

There is nothing wrong with the author's gift for observing his people. Their talk is unquestionably realistic, and Pat's soul struggles are described with sympathy and considerable insight. And no one can accuse Mr. McLiam of using domestic brawling for the purposes of humor. The squabbles are desperately in earnest, but, instead of being impressive or illuminating, their realism succeeds only in making them tiresome, repetitious and monstrously monotonous. Dullness is the real sin of unhappy, cantankerous old Pat Muldoon.

There are only the rarest occasions when the play comes to momentary dramatic life. These usually arrive in the appearances of Elaine Stritch, who brings a breath of fresh air by her portrayal of the sturdy and outspoken daughter of the Muldoons. For most of the time, though, the pall of tedium hangs over the narrative, despite the vigorousness of the acting, and the problems, religious and domestic, of the family are remarkably undramatic, while the occasional essays into lyric prose do little to brighten things. Mr. McLiam is better at his realistic details.

In a part that keeps him onstage for all save the first few minutes of the evening, James Barton offers vitality and force, and makes old Pat a believable figure. Miss Stritch has quite a personal triumph in her role, and there is an excellent characterization of the young priest by James Olson. Other helpful performances are contributed by Edgar Stehli as a smugly pious relative, by Katherine Squire as the bigoted but devoted wife, and by Patricia Bosworth as the gentler daughter. But "The Sin of Pat Muldoon" shows how futile good intentions can be in the theater.

**Daily Mirror**
March 14, 1957

***Robert Coleman's THEATRE:***

# 'Sin of Pat Muldoon' Is A Boring Drama

**• James Barton stars in new play at Cort.**

A lot of talent went into the perpetration of a misdemeanor called "The Sin of Pat Muldoon" at the Cort Wednesday evening. There was a sin, all right, against the patience of the audience, but it is difficult to assess the blame. Seldom have so many celebs collaborated on such a bore.

There's James Barton in the title role. He's been one of our favorites over the years, in musicals and straight plays. There's Richard Adler, co-composer of "The Pajama Game" and "Damn Yankees," teamed with the usually astute Roger L. Stevens in the sponsorship.

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**THERE'S JACK GARFEIN,** who won kudos as stager of "End as a Man," currently cast as director. And there's John McLiam, who's played parts in several clicks, in the author's seat this time out. A line-up like that should have spelled HIT in any league. But in our book, an ERROR must be flashed on the scoreboard.

**"The Sin of Pat Muldoon" did one thing, however: it attracted some of the lustiest coughers we've heard in the theatre this season. You needed a hearing aid to get through the barrage to the dialogue across the footlights. But there were a few sharp-eared first-nighters who thoughtfully repeated and explained the lines for the benefit of their neighbors.**

Pat Muldoon was a free-wheeling Irishman who lost his heart and a bit of his soul when the life of his only son was snuffed out on a prairie farm. Pat was so distraught that he even doubted the wisdom of God. He had two daughters, but they never filled the void.

Established as a tree surgeon in California, he sold a piece of property for $3,000, blew it on a siren and got a heart attack. He probably went on the bat to escape a nagging wife and a salty-tongued daughter. But when they brought him home from the hospital, the Xantippes really went to work on him.

• • •

**UNDER THE LECTURES** from his spouse and accusations from his daughter, Pat went to meet his Maker, well-meaning but a bit unregenerate to the end. Meanwhile, he had found time to further the elopement of his more gentle offspring to a young Mexican assistant.

**Barton is a wonderful trouper. He struggled valiantly to sell the irascible Pat to the preemies. Thanks to his genius, he met with a measure of success. But there were many of us Barton fans out front who just wished he'd forget the whole thing, and swing into his hilarious gem of show business, the saga of the souse and the mad dog.**

Elaine Stritch brought welcome vitality to a female chip off the Muldoon block, a sassy, hard-boiled breadwinner. Katherine Squire, Edgar Stehli, James Olson, Gerald Sarracini, Patricia Bosworth and John Heldabrand wrestled nobly with less than profitable roles.

The biggest yak of the evening came when Heldabrand, as a conscientious medico, announced, after sitting up all night with the patient and shunning breakfast, that he had an operation to perform in half an hour. It took some of the gloom off Mordecai Gorelik's fittingly drab set.

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**IT WAS A NOISY,** if not auspicious opening. You couldn't hear half the cliches, and maybe that was all to the good.

NEW YORK **Herald Tribune**
March 14, 1957

THEATER

# *'The Sin of Pat Muldoon'*

By WALTER KERR

IF THE curious combination of anger, bitterness, affection and outright terror that comes out of actress Elaine Stritch in the second-act wind-up of the new play at the Cort could in some way be stretched to cover the evening as a whole, then "The Sin of Pat Muldoon" mightn't be the long, lugubrious death-watch it is.

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Miss Stritch reels into her tattered California home—across the street from the local movie theater—to take one more slug of what has been easing her sorrows. She then barges into the dining-room that houses the great brass bedstead of her slowly dying father and lights into the old man with no holds barred.

He has been a gay dog in his day, and the particular bout with a Mexican enchantress that brought on his current heart attack has also seen every cent of the family's money tossed deliriously down the drain. The venom that has been building up in this long-suffering, sole-support daughter now blows off like scalding steam; as father rises to defend himself with a roar, the air turns blue; but as the defiant old humbug catches his breath and stumbles into near-oblivion, the fury of the girl is suddenly crossed with unexpected pity, with quick guilt, with a panic to see him saved. Miss Stritch strikes every note at once, clearly and movingly. For a short stretch, the play is thoroughly alive.

But this, I think, is the only genuinely dramatic moment that author John McLiam has conceived for his milieu-study of a devout, intolerant Irish family dominated by a man who will obey none of the rules. As a playwright, he has successfully managed almost everything else. The casual family inflections, the bickerings that take an underlying love for granted, the jocular insults and the private despairs have all been recorded with a careful and accurate ear. Mr. McLiam has a knack for background and a small, observant way with words (provided he isn't shooting for the folk-poetry that sees fit to make mention of "the deep well of her loveliness" while eyes glaze over and honest reporting stops).

He has also been decently served by director Jack Garfein (save for the sort of stylized love-scene in which two mute youngsters face awkwardly front, their arms hanging limp and longing at their sides in the manner of a standard Mexican print) and by a generally excellent company. James Olson's greenhorn priest, for instance, struggling helplessly with his own coltish inability to do anything about saving souls, is perfectly drawn. Katherine Squire's alternately badgering and tender mother, "squeezing the joy out of life" even as she tries ferociously to protect her charges, is unerringly worked out. Edgar Stehli, Patricia Bosworth, John Heldabrand and Gerald Sarracini do all that is asked of them ably.

Yet we are, in the end, chained to the bed that star James Barton lies on—with only an occasional caper to the nearest chair—for three long acts. Mr. Barton has certain devices for relieving our joint-confinement: endless maneuverings of his corkscrew mouth, a tendency to double his fists as he spoils for a fight, a bright comic bit in which he stealthily chain-smokes a single cigarillo. There's pleasure, too, in the sight of him wriggling his toes and snapping his fingers to guitar accompaniment while on the flat of his back.

But Mr. McLiam hasn't given his defeated roisterer the kind of stature or complexity that will keep us excitedly intent on him as he plunges from one heart attack to the next. (Indeed last evening's audience was easily distracted by the cigarette smoke a careless stage manager had allowed to drift in from the wings). This, you feel, is the way men and their familes disintegrate, all right. But where is the insight and the power that will scale so much suffering up to the size of the theater?

**The New York Times**

March 14, 1957

## 'Sin of Pat Muldoon' Staged at the Cort

ALTHOUGH James Barton spends all of the three acts dying in "The Sin of Pat Muldoon," he is the major bit of life in John McLiam's play, which opened at the Cort last night. From the opening moments when Mr. Barton, garbed in a maroon bathrobe, makes his entrance in a wheel-chair until the final curtain when he departs this earth he is the major focus, the pivot on which the pay revolves.

What a role Mr. McLiam has given him, one of the best he has had in a long time. As Pat Muldoon, a man who has turned against religion because of the loss of his beloved son, Kevin, but who, nevertheless, has retained his spirit and his humor, Mr. Barton is superb. He has captured the bitterness in the man's heart, as well as the resoluteness of his soul and his rugged, scarred and lined face, his gravel-toned voice are at his constant command.

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But even so splendid a performance and so toothsome a portrait are not sufficient to keep Mr. McLiam's play from sprawling and diffusing itself. Between the high scenes there are too many of the low ones, and while you watch and admire the central performer you keep probing and seeking for the point the author is trying to convey. And the truth seems to be that Mr. McLiam himself does not seem to be exactly certain of what the point is.

Basically, "The Sin of Pat Muldoon" is a static piece of work. Pat's heart attack occurred before the play began, while he was off on a binge with a Mexican enchantress. During the binge he squandered the family nest egg, thereby dooming his family to poverty.

The play itself is principally concerned with trying to win Pat back to the Church before his death. The scenes in which these attempts are undertaken are not without humor: Pat, arguing with his sanctimonius brother-in-law, Pat in debate with the young priest. There is no formal contrition in Pat, but for all his sins, Mr. McLiam is convinced that Pat is a good man. That probably is the truth. But it is difficult somehow to accept under the circumstances.

•

As the director, Jack Garfein has succeeded in extracting top-grade performances from his cast. Elaine Stritch, as the elder daughter who has been the main support of the family, gives a mettlesome rendition of a girl who at her core has her father's steel, his contempt for ritualistic religion and a sense of gaiety. She is, furthermore, excellent in her major scene with her father when she informs him that she has discovered his duplicity.

Katherine Squire, as the unhappy, God-fearing wife, Edgar Stehli as the platitude-spouting brother-in-law, Patricia Bosworth, as the timid younger daughter, James Olson as the earnest young father, John Heldabrand as the hard-working doctor and Gerald Sarracini as the Mexican suitor are all fine. And Mordecai Gorelik's two-room set reflects the austerity of the Muldoon family's Santa Clara home.

But "The Sin of Pat Muldoon" cannot escape its own inherent guilt. Only spasmodically does it reach out to tug at a viewer's heart.

L. B. F.

# "Good as Gold"

**DAILY NEWS**

March 8, 1957

## 'Good as Gold' Becomes a Little Tarnished Before Evening Ends

By JOHN CHAPMAN

"Good as Gold," which John Patrick has adapted from a novel by Alfred Toombs, started off very well last evening at the Belasco Theatre. It had Roddy McDowall, a visionary young scientist, coming to Washington, D. C., with a great scheme for transmuting gold into dirt—a special kind of dirt that would grow carrots 30 feet deep and lettuces as big as houses.

Here is an invention for the good of all mankind, but Roddy has come to the wrong place for it. Our national politicians foul everything up by claiming this miraculous dirt for national defense—for growing a seaweed barrier as our main line of coastal protection and for growing oak forests on enemy airfields.

This fantasy starts off brightly and satirically, with many good lines spoken by a fine cast of comedians, and it is helped enormously by the miraculous swift-changing settings designed by Peter Larkin.

### No Place to Go

But once it has got started it finds it has no place to go. Its basic joke has been told in detail in the first few minutes, and from here on to its rather pointless conclusion "Good as Gold" has to sweat and strain. Early in the play it is great fun to watch a small pot of flowers grow into a jungle monster, but afterward almost everything seems anticlimactic. Once inert gold has been transformed into ert soil, as one character brightly puts it, the plot is told and the joke is over.

The characters, though attractively played, are out of stock. Two congressmen, portrayed by Paul Ford and Robert Emhardt, are weasling, blustering bumbleheads as they squabble over who shall get the dirt. Ford, though, is as funny as possible, for he is a master of the delayed take and the well-timed line.

McDowall plays the young inventor with appealing earnestness, and there is a charming performance by Loretta Leversee as a clear-headed young Washington secretary. Zero Mostel, decked out in a fearsome beard, gets in somehow as an amiable faker who carries his bourbon in a hollow wooden leg.

I thought last evening that there was an attractive performance by Juleen Compton as a girl with an empty head and a full body. The back of the program says "she has been painted by Rivera and sculpted by Epstein." I challenge this information. I think bountiful Nature did both jobs.

As director, Albert Marre has worked manfully to keep "Good as Gold" glistering to the end, but before the end the tarnish begins to show.

"GOOD AS GOLD"

Comedy in two acts and twelve scenes by John Patrick, based on the book by Alfred Toombs; staged by Albert Marre; settings by Peter Larkin; costumes by Noel Taylor; presented by Cheryl Crawford with William Myers at the Belasco Theatre, March 7, 1957. The cast:

Commentator.... Edward Fuller
Benjamin..... Roddy McDowall
Policeman..... Dana Elcar
Doc Penny..... Zero Mostel
Barbara..... Loretta Leversee
Congressman Fairweather.... Paul Ford
Congressman Jason..... Robert Emhardt
McDougal..... John Harkins
Jail Officer..... Tom Ahearne
Radio Engineer.. Clarence Stemler
Photographer... Todd Patterson
Caucus Room Guard.. Clement Brace
U.S. Storage Vault Director... Hugh Evans
Fredrica..... Juleen Compton
Pilsudski..... Lou Gilbert

## New York Post

March 8, 1957

By Richard Watts Jr.

### An Attempt at Political Satire

It is cheering to have the theater return to frank political satire at our own expense, and it is a healthy sign of an improving national climate to find such works emerging once more, but I wish the lampooning were less heavy-handed than it turns out to be in "Good as Gold." John Patrick's dramatization of a novel by Alfred Toombs, which opened last night at the Belasco, deals its blows freely, and its heart is certainly in the right place, but I'm afraid it wastes its strength early in the evening, and ends as a disappointingly feeble and haphazard cartoon.

"Good as Gold" begins in an engaging mood of wild farcical gaiety, and it gives promise of being a fresh and amusing caricature of folly in contemporary Washington. It is significant, though, that even at its high point the chief laughter is supplied by a stroke of visual humor, when a plant starts growing so mightily that it comes through the walls and ceiling of a congressman's office, and is not the result of anything witty or pointed that Mr. Patrick has to say. Indeed, the dialogue is one of the weakest features of a steadily diminishing comedy.

**The Vegetables**

The basis of the narrative is the shocking effect on national governmental circles of an innocent young scientist's discovery of a method of developing vegetables and plants of a gigantic size. His scheme is to take the gold at Fort Knox and turn it into a dirt that produces monstrous carrots and cabbages, to mention just two of his early triumphs. It is his idealistic intention to end starvation throughout the world, but it isn't long before he is being investigated by congressional committees and looked on with suspicion by the FBI. He spends a lot of time in jail.

This use of the Federal Bureau of Investigation as a satirical butt, by the way, appears to have aroused such shocked indignation in certain out-of-town critical minds that the kidding was toned down by the alarmed management. It is very mild now, which is one of the comedy's weaknesses. It assuredly isn't the irreverent treatment of such reasonable targets as politicians and policemen, even the hallowed henchmen of J. Edgar Hoover, that makes "Good as Gold" so unsatisfactory. It's the way the satire has of disappearing into thin air.

**The Politicians**

There are funny things in the new play, in addition to those wild outbursts of plant life. When Paul Ford, as a blustering but well-meaning congressman, and Robert Emhardt, as one who is far from well-meaning, exhibit the noisy imbecilities of their kind, life returns to the satire. But the comedy's inventiveness lies almost entirely in its central conception of the gigantic vegetables, and, having set down the basic idea, "Good as Gold" is oddly unimaginative in trying to develop it. And the wit isn't forthcoming to atone for the collapse of the narrative.

It assuredly isn't the fault of the actors. Mr. Ford is not only an excellent comedian but an engaging one, and Mr. Emhardt is admirable at portraying the pompous skulduggery of the opposing representative. Roddy McDowall is believably naive and likable as the scientist, while Loretta Leversee is charming and genuine as the heroine and Juleen Compton is attractive and humorous as the young man's silly fiancee. Zero Mostel is amusing as an eccentric. But "Good as Gold" collapses sadly. It seems a great pity.

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## New York Herald Tribune

March 8, 1957

THEATER

### *'Good as Gold'*

By WALTER KERR

IN JOHN PATRICK'S adaptation of the Alfred Toombs novel "Good as Gold," an innocent young botanist discovers the secret of making carrots grow to the proportions of beached whales, cabbages grow until Chevrolets can be parked in their shade, and simple little ivy plants grow so carnivorously that they not only gobble up all the available furniture but start greedily after the chandeliers.

In fact, the only thing that won't grow is the play. In the course of parlaying a five-line joke into a twelve-scene fantasy, every dodge that a normally inventive and invariably whimsical dramatist can dream up is given a decent try.

In Washington, D. C., incoming and outgoing Senators roll by on enormous wheels. A whole troop of Boy Scouts marches sturdily into an investigating chamber, only to be carried out kicking and screaming. Two young lovers take to weighing one another on scales large enough to fill up the Belasco's proscenium arch. A girdle is mistaken for a secret weapon and sent off to the Pentagon, a Salvation Army Santa Claus is stripped to his underwear, and a resourceful inhabitant of the Thomas Jefferson Jail keeps his supply of bourbon flowing by tapping a spigot into his wooden leg. In short, there's no lack of gimmicks—only a general gasping for air.

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The basic problem, I think, is one of supply. The pyramid of nonsense has nothing to feed it. By way of a premise, the authors hand inventor Roddy McDowall a magical formula for turning gold into dirt; the general idea is that "gold can't produce anything by itself—dirt can." If Mr. McDowall can just get Congress to turn over all the bricks in Fort Knox, he'll be able to grow quite enough vegetables to feed the whole world.

But the notion isn't terribly funny as you say it. And once you've said it, it doesn't really open up into anything else. It's possible to bring on the majestically sulky Robert Emhardt as a Congressional investigator and have him sharpshoot the proposition; but no bold or stinging satirical point can come of the irrelevant fracas. It's possible to set the Army and Navy thinking of growing monstrous beds of seaweed to protect our shores from enemy submarines and to have Roddy McDowell object to the notion on humanitarian grounds, but neither incisive editorializing nor pungent farce can be squeezed from the giddy non sequiturs. The underlying joke seems to have no echoes, no ramifications, no engaging parallels; the evening is spent in trying to fill a vacuum with laughter.

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The effort takes a serious toll of Mr. Patrick's lighthearted way with offbeat dialogue. Once in a while—especially when the hound-dog solemnity of Paul Ford is given full play—a sly jibe at office-holders ("I don't want to seem selfish, but I don't see where I stand to benefit") or a thrust at battling Congressmen ("Don't you call me a liar off the floor!") crackles through. Too often, though, words are simply thrown in in triplicate ("It's the coldest cold war ever waged over wages" or "Somebody's behind this shooting me from behind") and the chatter degenerates into remarkably effortful punning. Mr. Patrick has had to work too hard, and every ounce of expended energy shows.

Peter Larkin's settings, including a magnificent backdrop of the House of Representatives with exactly five recumbent Representatives present, have all the flavor of antic cartooning that a playful dramatist could have asked for. And Zero Mostel, afloat in silky whiskers, does what he can to help the Messrs. McDowell and Ford urge things along. But it's an endlessly balky business—a jest that has no joy in its bones.

The New York Times
March 8, 1957

# *Theatre: 'Good as Gold'*

## John Patrick Comedy Opens at Belasco

By BROOKS ATKINSON

THINGS look promising when the curtain goes up on "Good As Gold" at the Belasco, where the comedy opened last evening.

Basing his study of political science on a book by Alfred Toombs, John Patrick says that the number of taxes we pay is foolish, that Congressmen are crackpots and F. B. I. operators are laboratory pedants. This seems to be playwriting in a constructive direction, indicating a refreshing lack of reverence for the people who process and implement our society.

And the cast that Albert Marre, the director, has trained in the art of lampooning is also promising. For Congressmen—Paul Ford, the portly, long-faced actor who played the querulous Colonel Purdy in Mr. Patrick's "The Teahouse of the August Moon"; and Robert Emhardt, another portly actor with a sanctimonious attitude that is maddening.

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For general mischief and skullduggery—Zero Mostel, the low-comedy performer, wearing whiskers and a wooden leg. For innocent idealism—Roddy McDowall, who blundered hilariously through the upside-down merriment of "No Time for Sergeants." For romance—Loretta Leversee, who is intelligent and enchanting, and ought to have no trouble attracting the attention of any properly educated young man.

All this looks promising. For Mr. Patrick attacks his theme in the broad style of cartooning. Benjamin Franklin, the scientist played by Mr. McDowall, has discovered a way to turn gold into dirt that will grow vegetables of a giant size at high speed and remove the specter of hunger from the whole world. The problem is how to fit this Utopian process into the technique of politics and preserve the purity of the scientist's motives.

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Using Mr. Toombs' professional knowledge of the humbug of government by intrigue and bombast, Mr. Patrick has written some uproarious lines and gone off on some hilarious tangents. But, alas, he does not drive straight on through the entire evening in the key of the opening scenes.

"Good as Gold" starts falling apart at about the halfway mark, and never recovers the initial momentum in the second and last act. It dawdles over romance. It brings down the curtain on a pious homily to the nobility of the democratic system, as though Mr. Patrick were horrified by his own satirical impudence in the early stretches of the play. Congressmen and the F. B. I. are not to be lampooned with impunity.

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Peter Larkin, who designed the whirlwind settings for "No Time for Sergeants," has given Washington a light going over with his scrawled scene designs for "Good as Gold." The actors already enumerated play with hearty good humor, and a lot of other actors conspire ably in Mr. Patrick's practical joke.

But the joke is over before the play is finished. Satire of Washington is probably superfluous.

New York World-Telegram
and
The Sun
March 8, 1957

# Threads of Dross Among the Gold

By TOM DONNELLY.

John Patrick's "Good as Gold" (at the Belasco) generates a fair number of chuckles, particularly in the early stretch of the evening, but it falls apart long before the final curtain. The hero is a botanist who has "invented" a soil which will cause vegetables to grow 100 times their normal size. His process calls for gold as a principal ingredient, he takes his formula to Washington, and you can imagine what happens to him when he goes about proclaiming, "I turn gold into dirt."

This hero is named Benjamin Franklin, and you can also imagine the reaction when he says to a pair of suspicious Federal Bureau of Investigation men, "My name is Benjamin Franklin." That's the trouble, in fact. "Good as Gold," which Mr. Patrick has derived from a book by Alfred Toombs, does not contain many surprises.

The groove is an all too familiar one. A young idealist stumbles upon a discovery which he envisions as a boon to mankind, he falls into the clutches of powerful greedy forces who want to use this discovery in unsavory ways, and in the end the situation is resolved by a bolt from the blue. (Traditionally the invention turns out to be no good; Mr. Patrick has managed a slight switch for HIS finale, let's hand him that. Or perhaps it was Mr. Toombs. I haven't read the book.)

**Lacks Requirements.**

If "Good as Gold" could boast the essential requirements, a fast pace and a series of progressively wilder developments, the antique nature of the framework could be overlooked. Indeed, it would scarcely be noticed.

But "Good as Gold" dawdles along the bypaths of a Saturday Evening Post romance, and its attempts to satirize Washington as the center of bumbling bureaucracy are pretty bumbling.

The incidentals are often amusing. Paul Ford, as a dimwitted Congressman who is always the last man in the room to comprehend the simplest remark, is resoundingly funny. If enough Congressmen get a look at Mr. Ford's epic study in vacancy, I shouldn't be surprised to hear talk from the capital about passing a law against him.

**Heavy-Handed Spoofing.**

When it turns to a consideration of the antic ways of Congressional committees, however, "Good as Gold" is remarkably heavy-handed, and the regularity with which the hero of the piece is tossed into jail without due process is not only a libel on Washington, but a bore on the stage. Even the scenic efforts are out of whack. There is one fine mechanical inspiration: a violet, touched by the magic soil, bursts out of its small container and climbs through the ceiling with malignant force, causing Congressman Ford, already fearful of the return of those assassins who once shot up the gallery, to trot out his pistol in a spasm of hysteria.

In another scene, the FBI men are called upon to examine an enormous carrot, which has sprouted on the White House lawn and thrown all the legislators into a panic. There it sits before us, a huge papier mache carrot, that and nothing more. The FBI men approach it in fear and trembling, twittering that it must be a secret weapon. The comic illusion crumbles into silliness. The moral here is, one off-stage carrot might be 100 times more alarming than one on-stage carrot.

Too bad. Washington is a wide-open target, but playwright Patrick has gone after it with a pop-gun.

"Good as Gold" is nicely acted throughout. Roddy McDowell is an amiable hero, Zero Mostel has his moments as scalawag who maintains a constant supply of whisky in his wooden leg, Loretta Leversee is attractive as the principal girl in the case, and Robert Emhardt is OK as a Congressman slightly brighter than the one portrayed by Mr. Ford, though considerably less winning.